



Fact Sheet
The National Student/Parent Mock Election
The nation's oldest, largest, and most successful
voter education project

What is the National Student/Parent Mock Election?

- The National Student/Parent Mock Election is the nation's largest and most successful voter education program. Except for 2006 and 2007, it has been funded by Congress since 1994. The National Student/Parent Mock Election is authorized in both No Child Left Behind and the Help America Vote Act.
- Past participation:
 - 1982: 250,000 American students took part
 - 1984: 2 million
 - 1988: 3.5 million
 - 1992: 5 million
 - 1996 and 2000: a combined total of over 10 million votes were cast. In the 2000 Mock Election, more than 1 million votes were cast via the Internet, the greatest number ever for a politically oriented event.
 - 2006: 1,232,613 votes. Note that NSPME remained "the nation's largest voter education project," well ahead of any of its competitors both in number of states involved (all 50) and in number of votes achieved, despite having lost its congressional funding.

- Participants include kindergartners, elementary, secondary school as well as college students in all 50 states, Washington, D.C., and in American schools all around the world. Since the Mock Election began in 1980, almost 50 million young voters, and often their parents as well, have learned what it means to be an American.
- 73% of the states partner with the National Student/Parent Mock Election, which is endorsed by the National Association of Secretaries of State. In 2006, twenty states were coordinated or co-coordinated by their secretary of state or state election director. In others, the governor or another state official has formalized the partnership while some states are coordinated by such groups as the League of Women Voters or the state social studies council.
- Sixty national educational, civic, business and religious organizations cooperate with the project including the Council of Chief State School Officers, the National Association of State Boards of Education, the National School Boards Association, the American Association of School Administrators, the National Council for the Social Studies, the U.S. Chamber of Commerce, and the League of Women Voters of the United States. See the full list at www.nationalmockelection.org/why_supporters.html.
- Outstanding Mock Election projects nominated at the school, school district and state level receive awards from the National Association of State Boards of Education, the American Association of School Administrators, the National Association of Secondary School Principals, the National Association of Student Councils, and the League of Women Voters.
- To communicate with our potential audience we rely on gifts in-kind, technology and resources from private corporations, broadcast networks, and publishing companies, which in the past have included such corporations as The New York Times, USA Today, TIME Inc., CNN, PBS stations, McGraw Hill, ABC TV, and the National Association of Broadcasters.

Why is the National Student/Parent Mock Election important to America?

Educating the next generation of young voters remains an urgent need:

- An American Bar Association Poll, released in August of 2004, found that Americans are not sure what the separation of powers means: only 56% could identify the three branches of government and one in five thought the answer was Democrat, Republican and Independent. Six percent thought the separation of powers meant "Republicans can do some things, but Democrats can do others" and 27% thought it meant that the Justice Department has different duties than the Defense Department. That same year, the John S. and James L. Knight Foundation announced the results of survey of the nation's teenagers: one-third of the students believed the Bill of Rights went too far.

- Eight of ten 15 to 26-year-olds know that the animated Simpson's family lives in Springfield, but fewer than half know the political party of their state's governor, and only 40% can say which party controls Congress, a 2004 Rutgers study found.

While youth voting rates have increased in recent years, our work is not done:

- Young people 18-31 will number 50 million in 2008. By 2015, they will constitute one-third of the electorate.
- The present generation of young Americans under the age of 18 constitutes the largest population group in the nation's history. According to CIRCLE's The Youth Vote 2004, youth voting surged by 11 percentage points in 2004. In presidential election years between 1972 and 2000, the turnout rate had declined by 16 percentage points among young citizens before rebounding by 11 percentage points in the 2004 election.
- In the 2006 midterm elections, nearly two million more Americans under 30 voted as compared to the 2002 midterm elections, according to the Pew Charitable Trust.

The youth turnout increased from 22.5 percent in 2002 to 25.5 percent in 2006, a 3 percent gain and the greatest percentage increase in turnout for any age group for the second election in a row, Pew said.

- In the 2008 elections, it appears the youth vote will have an ever greater impact in deciding America's future course as increasing numbers of young people go to the polls. Concern over some of the burning issues of our time, the war in Iraq, the economy and immigration, no doubt stirred young voters but there are indications that our Mock Elections, past and present have educated and inspired students and often their parents to learn more about their civic responsibilities and to register and vote.
- Two-thirds of young people said they had already voted or were likely to vote. But those most likely NOT to vote included 51% of Latinos, 46% of youth with high school or lower education level, 44% of non-college women, 43% of independents, and 40% of women in the South.
- Another fact in the upcoming elections, as we continue to reach out to all students and all their parents, is the growing number of nonwhite Americans, who now top 100 million for the first time.

"The new demographic divide has broader implications for social programs and education spending for youth," said Mark Mather, deputy director of domestic programs for the Population Reference Bureau, a nonpartisan research group. More than 20 percent of children in the United States are foreign born or have a parent who was foreign born. Nearly half of the children under age 5 are Hispanic, black or Asian, according to the U.S.

Census. We must help all children and their parents to become educated, informed voters.

We cannot underestimate the influence that future young voters will have in shaping our nation:

- Eighty-eight percent of Americans want their children taught about elections, democracy and ethical behavior starting in elementary schools and continuing through high school, according to a July survey for Leo J. Shapiro & Associates marketing in Chicago. Elections and democracy are central to what the Mock Election stands for.
- The University of Colorado's evaluation found that participating in the National Student/Parent Mock Election increased political decision-making ability, the belief that voting is important, informed involvement on current issues, the belief that social studies classes are relevant, and the discussion of political and election topics with parents. Participation decreased the sense of powerlessness.

Years of hard work and voter education have made a difference—we simply cannot slow down now.

- Recommendations for effective voter mobilization published in 2006 by the Circle for Information and Research on Civic Learning and Engagement (CIRCLE) include that of starting with the youth, particularly among ethnic and immigrant populations: “Young voters in these communities are easier to reach, are more likely to speak English (cutting down translation costs), and are the most effective messengers within their communities.” Another proven fact to keep in mind is that initial mobilization produces repeat voters. If people have been motivated to get to the polls once, they are more likely to return. So, getting young people to vote early could be key to raising a new generation of voters.
- The nation's governors were urged by retired Justice Sandra Day O'Connor of the U.S. Supreme Court to push for improved civics instruction in public schools that would help students appreciate the separation of powers among the executive, legislative and judicial branches.

“The need to educate our youth about our government and how it works is crucial to our future as a nation,” she said. “We don't inherit that through the gene pool; we have to do it.”

How did the National Student/Parent Mock Election begin?

The National Student/Parent Mock Election began as part of NBC's Parent Participation TV Workshops Project, produced by Edward Stanley and Gloria Kirshner. The workshops sought to teach parents how to use television dramas to open communication with their children, mold their values and discover and develop their identity and future goals. After identifying the elections as a huge national

drama that could enable parents and children to communicate more effectively with each other, the first National Student/Parent Mock Election (NSPME) was run in 1980. In 1982, the NSPME was spun off as a separate nonprofit, nonpartisan organization devoted to helping students, and often their parents as well, to become educated, informed voters and active participants in this democracy.

What happens in a National Student/Parent Mock Election?

Picture this:

It is five days before Election Day and many of the media are represented at national headquarters for the National Student/Parent Mock Election, watching as the results come in from all 50 states and American schools around the world. The voices of millions of young Americans are about to be heard.

The students have studied the candidates and their positions, held issues forums and debates, mock press conferences, cable call-in programs and get-out-the-vote campaigns. They have been preparing for weeks, even months, for this event. Schools have appointed school coordinators while students and parents have decorated their school election headquarters. Some have borrowed voting machines from local election officials while others are preparing to vote on their school computers and send their votes electronically to their state election headquarters or to national election headquarters. Some will be tallying paper ballots and transmitting their results by phone or fax. In many of the classrooms and at many of the state election headquarters, governors, senators, congressmen and candidates are joining the young voters and often parents, too. Tonight is their night.

At national election headquarters on Mock Election Day there is a flurry of activity. Who will verify that each state's vote comes in at the appointed time? Who will call urgently if a state is missing? Who will take care of the schools that have lost their Web-voting ID? Who will enter the thousands of faxes and add the votes to each state's totals? Who will handle the phoned-in votes? How about the HelpLine? How about the overseas schools and the American students all around the world? Are there enough blank ballots to record the votes? The students are voting on national issues as well as on candidates. Is each state's ballot accurate? Can we keep it all straight? Will a state coordinator go to dinner and forget to send in an entire state's vote? The press has been promised national totals by the end of the evening. Can we make it? Who will be handling the press calls? The TV cameras?

Suddenly the vast room is quiet. It is time for the votes to start pouring in. Each state has a required reporting time, ready or not. Fifty states must report at five-minute intervals. Will all 50 make it? Will all the overseas schools too?

Millions of students and sometimes their parents as well have been voting in classrooms, schools, community centers, state capitols, even hospital rooms, all across the nation all day and reporting their vote totals to their state or national election headquarters. Each state has been tallying its results and sending them to national election headquarters. The press is flashing results across the airwaves.

Who will be elected the next President of the United States? Which party will win control of the Senate? The House? Who will be elected the next governor? What issues matter most to students across the state? Across the nation?

Miraculously, by the end of the evening all votes have been counted. They will be recounted the next day for accuracy, but it isn't the numbers that matter. Mock Election Day is the culmination of months of learning the power of participation in our democracy.

Past Participants have this to say:

In Pennsylvania, Mary Beth Nanna, then in Grade 7, wrote, "One day in September in Mrs. Raptosh's class, we were talking about voting and the importance of it. I raised my hand and confessed that my parents didn't vote. Mrs. Raptosh told me that I should convince them to register and vote. She explained that every vote counted, and one vote could make a difference. When I thought about it, I realized that they should vote, because people fought and died for a right that so many people today take for granted. So I went home and told them about my day. I didn't think they would take me seriously, and at first, they didn't. They just said no. Mrs. Raptosh encouraged me to keep trying, and I did. After about a month I proved my point and they registered ... [and] they voted for the first time. Now I see to it that they vote in every election, and I will try too when I'm old enough. I can now say that my parents vote, and be proud of it."

Utah's *Deseret News* carried this story, Friday, November 03, 2000, written by Dainon Moody:

"For at least a handful of students, this mock election took on almost as much meaning as the real deal. For Kellie Mudrow's third-grade class at Lincoln Elementary in Layton, several of her students hail from outside the United States --- Venezuela, Peru, Chile, Mexico --- and are not yet citizens. Result? Their families are very excited for their children to get to vote, since they can't do so yet.

"Their families aren't going to get the opportunity to vote at all, so I think (the students) felt like they were going to vote for their families,' Mudrow said. 'Some others are excited to have an adult-type political experience, but for these kids, it's and opportunity for them to feel like they're real Americans.'

"Some were even given copies of the ballots used in the election on request of their parents, who wanted to see what one looked like. One little boy who speaks almost no English was proud to announce that he knew which presidential candidate he was going to vote for.

"When he walked out of the booth, he was glowing. He wouldn't take off his 'I Voted' sticker and just kept saying, 'Tell my mama, tell my mama.'"

"Students whose parents are citizens also were excited with the experience, one they admitted they didn't think they'd have before age 18. 'Every vote counts. And you don't just vote, you want to try and see why you're voting for that person,' said

Matt Martin, a West Bountiful Elementary fourth-grader. 'It's important to vote so we have a choice of who we want instead of the government being able to say 'This is our president' and stuff.'"

In Oklahoma, Dawn (now 30 years old) wrote via e-mail, "I was one of the kids who voted in the first "mock election" back in 1980. Did it again in 1984 and 1988. In 1992, I cast my first vote in the actual voting booth, and I haven't missed an election since. Why? Because someone cared enough to start and struggle to maintain a project aimed at teaching little ones the importance of voting...those "mock elections" made an impression; the "habit" of voting was firmly imprinted by 1988, enough so that I was a bit annoyed at the fact that I couldn't actually go to the polls...there would be...fewer voters out there today if it weren't for that wonderful non-profit voter education project."

"...I participated in an event, the Mock Election...that saw students hungry to learn about issues, hungry to experience the right to vote, and hungry to speak their minds about issues relevant to their lives. It was one of the top three events in my teaching career of ten years."

Sandra Lippee, Formerly, Scripps Ranch High School, California

"The research is clear – getting young people involved in the local and national political process as they come to citizenship age is a vital aspect of engaging them as empowered participants in the political system. The National Student/Parent Mock Election is an organization that is committed to that goal and has a long history of energizing local connections that facilitate participation."

Professor Anne Hildreth, Dept. of Political Science, State University of Albany, SUNY